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DE RUEHOU #0734/01 2211026
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 081026Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4046
INFO RUEHAB/AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN 0730
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OUAGADOUGOU 000734

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECIN](#) [IV](#) [UV](#)

SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: IVOIRIAN PRESIDENT MAKES HISTORIC VISIT AND
SIGNS COOPERATION AGREEMENT

11. (U) Summary: On July 27-29, President Laurent Gbagbo of Cote d'Ivoire visited Ouagadougou for his first official visit to Burkina Faso since he took power in 2002. The trip was intended to normalize relations between the two countries and was crowned with the signing of a formal friendship and cooperation agreement. Both leaders expressed their desire to build a framework for strong cooperation, work to strengthen regional institutions, and improve the economic situation of West Africa. While Compaore and Gbagbo appeared to put their tense past behind them in public, some Burkinabe regarded the visit with skepticism and are taking a "wait and see" approach with the Ivorian leader. End Summary.

President Laurent Gbagbo's Historic Visit to Burkina

12. (U) Following years of tense relations between the two countries, this was the first official visit between the leaders to occur since 2002. In the past, President Gbagbo repeatedly accused his Burkinabe counterpart of destabilizing Cote d'Ivoire with his alleged support to Ivoirian rebels. Meanwhile, President Compaore blamed his Ivoirian counterpart for human rights abuses against Burkinabe residents of Cote d'Ivoire and even called for Gbagbo to be brought before an international criminal tribunal.

13. (U) Despite this troubled past, President Gbagbo was received by his Burkinabe hosts with all the respect due to his rank; he was met at Ouagadougou airport by President Compaore, Prime Minister Tertius Zongo, cabinet members, diplomats, a twenty-one gun salute, and a festive crowd of Burkinabe and Ivorian citizens. During the visit, President Gbagbo participated in a State dinner, addressed the Burkinabe National Assembly on the subject of renewed peace and bilateral cooperation, and received the Great Cross of Burkina Faso, the "Grand Croix de l'Ordre National Burkinabe." At the end of the visit, President Compaore accepted an invitation to visit Cote d'Ivoire at a future date.

President Gbagbo Addresses the National Assembly:

14. (U) On July 28, President Gbagbo addressed the Burkinabe National Assembly. He told parliamentarians, "I came here to announce that the storm is over and war is at an end in Cote d'Ivoire." He raised the urgent need to strengthen the links between Burkinabe and Ivoirian communities and pleaded for solidarity. Gbagbo noted that the former Upper Volta and Cote d'Ivoire once formed a single nation, and that relations between his country and Burkina should serve as a "backbone for West African integration." He cautioned that, as the economic powerhouse of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), any threat to Cote d'Ivoire's peace would adversely affect other member countries. President Gbagbo advocated for a stronger shared currency to permit member countries to meet the many challenges they face. (NOTE: The CFA is the common currency of the eight UEMOA countries in West Africa.) He condemned the scourges of brain drain and human trafficking in West Africa and advocated for better higher education opportunities for future leaders. Gbagbo also highlighted other

regional challenges including: HIV/AIDS, meningitis, environmental and energy problems, and the food crisis.

Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation:

¶5. (U) On July 29, Presidents Compaore and Gbagbo signed an agreement to improve friendship, enhance cooperation, and further economic development between Burkina and Cote d'Ivoire. Both commended the strong ties between their two communities and agreed to establish a consultative framework to ensure a dynamic partnership for peace, stability, and prosperity for both nations. They agreed that disputes concerning the interpretation of this agreement would be addressed through diplomatic channels.

¶6. (U) The consultative framework includes coordination in the areas of:

- foreign policy;
- defense and security;
- training, employment, and social reintegration of the youth;
- free movement of people and goods;
- culture;
- road and railway infrastructures;
- agriculture and cattle farming;
- energy;
- aerial transportation; and
- communication.

¶7. (U) Both parties also agreed to:

- establish a common fund for youth training, employment, and social reintegration;

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-- take urgent steps to improve postal services and address payment problems related to money orders from their respective countries; and

-- inform other UEMOA and ECOWAS member countries of the progress of cooperation between Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire.

¶8. (U) Finally, President Blaise Compaore expressed his satisfaction with the implementation of the Ivoirian peace accords and reaffirmed his support for the Ivoirian Government and people in their peace and security efforts. Compaore urged the players in the Ivoirian crisis and the international community to make every effort to support the November 30 presidential elections in Cote d'Ivoire.

Burkinabe Appreciate Visit, but are Cautious

¶9. (U) Most Burkinabe applauded President Gbagbo's visit to Burkina Faso and believed it would facilitate the normalization of relations between the two countries. Some even went so far as to publicly call President Gbagbo "a man of peace and truth." The government controlled-newspaper, "Sidwaya" commemorated the visit with a full page photo insert of the two leaders shaking hands. The journal commented that the visit sent a signal that things are moving in the right direction between Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso and called on Burkinabe citizens to take pride in the visit.

¶10. (U) Despite the positive official reception, some privately owned newspapers reported more skeptically on President Gbagbo's ambitions for Burkina and the sub-region. The daily newspaper, "Le Pays," called for caution and opined that President Gbagbo and his entourage are used to doing the opposite of what they had promised to do the day before. "Le Pays" called on Burkinabe to care about actions, not words. The paper also speculated that Anglophone countries like Nigeria are jealous of Cote d'Ivoire as an economic powerhouse and may work to undermine good relations between Burkina and Cote d'Ivoire.

¶11. (U) "L'Observateur," another privately owned paper, commended Gbagbo's ambition for both UEMOA and ECOWAS members, primarily for the landlocked countries of Burkina, Mali, and Niger. (NOTE:

President Gbagbo has stated that he plans to contribute to the economic development of his land-locked neighbors by ensuring electrical interconnection and constructing a gasoline pipeline. END NOTE.) However, "L'Observateur" noted that loyalty is key to such cooperation and, like "Le Pays", it advised caution with its headline: "See Before You Believe."

¶12. (SBU) Comment: The "ping-pong" of accusations and criticisms between the two presidents seems to be far behind them now. Both Compaore and Gbagbo appear to want peace, security, and economic development. However, despite this demonstration of Gbagbo's willingness to cooperate, political observers advise caution and recommend Burkina adopt a "wait and see" approach. In the past, Gbagbo has been criticized for failing to keep his promises. Whatever individual intentions may be in the region (whether from Gbagbo or other leaders), this visit has been another example of President Compaore's continued efforts to contribute to overall regional stability and cooperation, not hinder it.

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